

NOVENA TO ST. JOHN BOSCO

For each day of the Novena, there is a reading from Scriptures, a reading from the life or teaching of St. John Bosco, and a prayer.

DAY 1: THE LOVING GOD WHO IS EVER PRESENT

Scripture Reading: (Matthew 6: 25-33)

Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat (or drink), or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they?"

Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?"

Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them.

If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?"

So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?'

All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides."

Reading: (From Teresio Bosco, *Mama Margaret: Mother of Don Bosco*)

St. John Bosco's mother, Mama Margaret introduced a loving God to her children. If the night was bright and cloudless, star-filled, she would say to them as they stood outside, "God created the world and put all the stars up there." When the fields were covered in flowers, she would say, "How many wonderful things the Lord has made for us." After the crop had ripened, after the harvest, catching her breath again after work, she would say, "Let's give thanks to the Lord. He has been good to us. He has given us our daily bread." Even when rain and hail ruined the crops, she invited them to reflect, "The Lord has given; the Lord has taken away."

John learned to recognize this great person, unseen, but everywhere present: in heaven, in the countryside, in the face of the poor, in his conscience, saying, "You have done well. You have done wrong." A person in whom his mother had unlimited confidence. A good Father and Provider, someone who gives us our daily bread, sometimes lets things happen to us: the death of a dear one, hailstorms in the vineyard, things at times difficult to understand, but, "He knows why, and that's good enough for us."

Thus, from his earliest years, John Bosco had an image of God filtered through nature and events of daily life. This was the God his mother introduced to him with her words and her examples. As a result, "John Bosco never needed a kneeler to pray on. He would just lift up his eyes, look around, and speak to God."

Prayer: The Our Father

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 2: LOVE FOR JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Scripture Reading: (John 6:47-51, 53-58)

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

Reading: (from Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Outlook and Spirituality*. Trans. By John Drury. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996, p. 94-96, 460)

St. John Bosco taught young people to love Jesus in the Eucharist, to receive communion worthily and often, and to make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. In his biography on St. Dominic Savio, one of his students, Don Bosco wrote, "It is the body, blood, soul, and divinity which Jesus offered on the cross to His Eternal Father. What else do I need to be happy? Nothing in this world. Just to be able to see Him whom I now see by faith and adore on the altar."

Don Bosco describes Dominic's attitude toward Holy Communion: "His preparation for communion was devout and edifying. The night before, on going to bed, he said a special prayer concluding with: "Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament!" In the morning he gave himself ample time for preparation, but his thanksgiving knew no bounds. Most of the time, if he were not reminded, he would forget all about breakfast and recreation and school, so rapt was he in prayer and in contemplation of the goodness of God, who opens his treasures of mercy to us in ways that defy description."

"This spiritual attitude let Dominic pass his days in true joy. It accounts for his deep happiness and the heavenly bliss which shone in his face at all times."

To Fr. Michael Rua, the first of his followers to be sent away from him to be a director of another Oratory, Don Bosco advised him "not to make a decision without first raising his heart to God. He was to take care of his physical and 'moral' health, celebrating Mass and saying his breviary, making meditation every morning and visiting the Blessed Sacrament in the course of the day."

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you give us your body and blood in the Eucharist as a sign that even now we share your life. May we come to possess it completely in the Kingdom where you live forever and ever. Amen.

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 3: THE HOLY SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: (John 14:11-18, 23-26)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.

And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.

I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.

Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.

I have told you this while I am with you.

The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name--he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.”

Reading: (from Eugenio Ceria, *Don Bosco with God*. Nairobi, Kenya: St. Paul Communications/Daughters of St. Paul; 2008, p. 155-156)

Gift of Counsel

The spirit of the Lord, which spoke through the mouth of Don Bosco, was seen in the wonderful freedom with which he shared his advice, whether asked for or not, with people of every kind, poor or rich, uneducated or learned, of low or high rank. He inspired people with wise and holy thoughts.

A further proof that the Spirit of the Lord was on the lips of Don Bosco was the ease with which he gave advice, and could adapt his advice, with an efficacy that proved irresistible, even when the advice was hard to accept. Priests, clerics and young people experienced this every day at the Oratory (the name Don Bosco gave to the place where he gathered young people), whether they met him in the playground, in his room or in the confessional.

The advice he used to give in the playground became known as “the word in the ear.” For as long as he was able to, Don Bosco took part in the boys’ recreation.... This gave him the opportunity to get to know them, and speak an appropriate word to each of them, at the right moment.

(...) Don Bosco would put his hand on a boy’s head, lean over and whisper a word secretly in his ear, putting the other hand round his mouth so that nobody else would hear. It took only a few seconds but the results were magic! You could see the change of expression on the boy’s face and the reaction: a sudden smile, a serious look, a blushing or tears, an answer yes or no, repeating Don Bosco’s gesture by whispering in his ear, hearing the word again, a shout of *thanks* and running off to play or to the chapel, It sometimes happened that a boy heard Don Bosco’s word and remained by his side as if absorbed in some marvelous idea. Other effects were seen later: going to the sacraments,

becoming more recollected in prayer, greater diligence in his scholastic duties, better behavior or greater charity towards his companions.

Prayer: Lord, may the Helper, the Spirit who Jesus sends upon us, fill our hearts with light and lead us to all truth as your Son promised, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 4: LOVE FOR THE CHURCH (LOYALTY TO THE CHURCH AND TO THE POPE)

Scripture Reading: (Matthew 16: 13-19)

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Reading: (Various quotes from Don Bosco taken from *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life* by Francis Desramaut, translated by Roger M. Luna. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1979, p. 114).

Baptism is, for the Christian, the entrance "into the bosom of Holy Mother Church... The Sacraments, instituted by our loving Savior, were instituted for me. Through his death Jesus opened heaven for me and prepared it for me. And in order that I might have someone who would look after me, he wished to give me God himself for my Father, the Church for my mother, and the Divine Word for my guide."

"Within the bosom of the Catholic Church everyone, no matter what his condition, can reach perfection in all virtues" (introduction to Don Bosco's story of St. Isidore the farmer).

"The Church's visible head is the Roman Pontiff, who assisted by Jesus Christ, takes his place on earth and for this reason is called the Vicar of Jesus Christ."

"No one can belong to the Church of Jesus Christ if he is not united with this head whom he put in charge."

To the Salesian Cooperators: "Every day, each one will recite an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* in honor of Saint Francis de Sales, according to the intentions of the Holy Father."

“Hold fast to only one God, one faith, one Baptism and one true religion.”

(From the Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco, Vol. V, p. 383, 571)

“No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake.”

“The Pope’s wishes must be a command for us.”

Prayer: God our Father, may your church always be your holy people, united as you are one with the Son and the Holy Spirit. And we pray for your servant, Pope Benedict XVI. By his example and teaching, and under his leadership, may your Church be for all the world a sign of your unity and holiness, as it grows to perfection in your love. We ask this through Christ, your Son, our Lord.

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 5: DEVOTION TO MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Scripture Reading: (John 19:25-27)

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son."

Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

(Or the Wedding at Cana, John 2: 1-11)

Reading: 2 options

From Don Bosco’s words: (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, XIII, 319-320)

“Having been redeemed by Jesus Christ, we become [Mary’s] children and the brothers of her divine Son. Thus, by becoming the mother of Jesus, true God and true man, she also become our mother. Jesus Christ in his great mercy wants to call us brothers and by doing so makes us adopted children of Mary.”

“Mothers always keep special treats in reserve for their loved ones, but they like to be asked. That’s the way earthly mothers are. Is our good heavenly Mother different? No, trust me. . . . If we pray to her from our heart, she will promptly aid us, because we are her special children.”

“I urge you as best I can – may my words be engraved upon your minds and hearts – to call upon the name of Mary, specifically saying, “Mary Help of Christians, pray for us!” Brief as it is, it has been found to be a most effective prayers. . . . We all have our problems, we all need help. When in need of a spiritual favor, make it a habit of repeating this invocation.”

From Pope John Paul II: (Address before leading the recitation of the Angelus on January 31, 1988; *L'Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 8, 1988, p. 5)

Don Bosco ... profoundly venerated, loved and imitated our Lady under the title of "Auxilium Christianorum" (Help of Christians). He insistently spread her devotion; in her he saw the basis of his now worldwide work in favor of youth and of the promotion and defense of the faith. He liked to say that "Mary built her Basilica [of Mary Help of Christians in Turin] herself," as if to emphasize that Our Lady had miraculously inspired his entire spiritual and apostolic journey as a great educator and, in an even broader way, that Mary had been placed by God as help and protection of the entire Church...

We are well aware that devotion to Mary as Help of Christians precedes the era of her great devotee Don Bosco. The title is already found in the Litany of Loreto and emphasizes Mary's active presence in the difficult moments of the Church's history: the presence of unexpected deliverance, a prodigious sign of the unfailing assistance of the Spirit of truth and grace.

Today, when faith is being put to the test, and various sons and daughters of the People of God are exposed to tribulations because of their fidelity to the Lord Jesus, ... the Church feels the need of Mary's maternal intervention, ... especially to educate, in the Christian meaning of life, the young people to whom Don Bosco gave his entire self as Father and Teacher.

Prayer: A Hail Mary
St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 6: THE SAINTS AND THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

Scripture Reading: (Matthew 5: 1-16, 43-48)

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.

He began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.
Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.
"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.
For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same?
And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?
So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Reading: (Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, p. 114, 225)

(To encourage others, especially young people, to imitate the holiness of the saints and holy people, Don Bosco wrote the stories of the saints). He would say, "Let us always recall that the virtues of others should spur us on to do good, according to the saying of Saint Augustine: "If he can do it, why can't I?"

(from Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Outlook and Spirituality*. Trans. By John Drury. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996, p. 200, 204)

On writing the life of St. Dominic Savio, Don Bosco urged young people to become holy, and assured them that it is possible for a young person to be a saint. "Dominic heard a sermon on the easy way of becoming a saint. The priest stressed three points which deeply impressed the lad's soul: it is God's will that we all become saints; it is not hard to become a saint; there is a great reward in heaven for those who become saints. The talk fell like a glowing spark on Dominic's heart, setting it afire with intense love of God."

Later, Dominic told a new student of his discovery, "It's simple. Here we make holiness consist in being very joyful. Our only worry is to avoid sin as the great enemy of our souls which steals God's peace and grace from our hearts. We try to do our duties well and willingly pray. You can start right now and take as your slogan, *Serve the Lord in holy joy!*"

And Don Bosco revealed the secret of his method in helping young people to holiness: "My advice is to be careful that we suggest easy things, lest we frighten or tire the faithful – especially the young. Fasting, long prayers, and like austerities are usually dropped after a while or carried out grudgingly and with no heart. Stick to easy things, but be faithful to them!"

Prayer: The Our Father

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 7: FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Scripture Reading: (Luke 18:16-17)

Jesus called the children to himself and said, "Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

Or (1 Timothy 4:12-15)

Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Until I arrive, attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching.

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate.

Be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone.

Reading:

Don Bosco on the young and his dedication to their education and evangelization:

- Young people are the favored portion "of the human race, on whom were set the hopes of the country, the prosperity of the family, and the honor of religion."
(from Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Outlook and Spirituality*. Trans. By John Drury. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996, p. 69)

From Don Bosco's various sayings recorded by his students (*Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*)

- "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys"
- "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life"
- "Here in your midst I feel completely at home; living means being here with you."
- "You have all stolen my whole heart, of which nothing remains to me except a lively desire to love you in the Lord, to do good to you, to save the souls of all of you."
- "My dear sons in Jesus Christ, whether I am at home or away, I am always thinking of you."
- "I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you showed a special love for young people, and call all to become like them in trust and innocence. Help us all to grow in trust and love for God. Increase in young people your gifts of holiness, wisdom, joy, purity, and love for their brothers and sisters.

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 8: HOLINESS OF DAILY LIFE

Scripture Reading: (Luke 6: 35-38)

“Love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as (also) your Father is merciful.

“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

(or Last Judgment from Matthew 25, 31-46, cf. 34th Sunday, Year A)

Reading: (from Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Outlook and Spirituality*. Trans. By John Drury. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996, p. 202, 204)

Influenced by the spirituality of St. Frances de Sales, Don Bosco taught that being a saint is easy. He pointed out “the innate link between sanctity and the duties of one’s state of life—the service God asks of us for our age and condition. For young people that would include joy, study, piety, purity, obedience, love of God, and love of neighbor.”

In the biography of his holy student, St. Dominic Savio that Don Bosco wrote, he teaches, “It’s simple. Here we make holiness consist in being very joyful. Our only worry is to avoid sin as the great enemy of our souls which steals God’s peace and grace from our hearts. We try to do our duties well and willingly pray. You can start right now and take as your slogan, *Serve the Lord in holy joy.*”

He takes into account young people’s life circumstances and level of maturity in the following words on spiritual practices, “My advice is to be careful that we suggest easy things, lest we frighten or tire the people – especially the young. Fasting, long prayers, and like austerities are usually dropped after a while or carried out grudgingly and with no heart. Stick to easy things, but be faithful to them.”

(Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, p. 225)

“Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in doing our duty well according to our state and our condition. Our greatest concern, then, should be to fulfill the duties of our state, even the most simple. On this depends our holiness, our salvation, our eternal happiness or unhappiness. The most indifferent actions, such as manual labor, wholesome recreation, eating and drinking can have great merit.”

“My life experience has been that only the practice of religion can assure concord in families and the happiness of those who live in this valley of tears.”

Prayer: The Our Father

St. John Bosco, pray for us.

DAY 9: ZEAL FOR SOULS (KINGDOM OF GOD)

Scripture Reading: (John 10: 10b-17)

Jesus said, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.”

Reading: (from Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Outlook and Spirituality*. Trans. By John Drury. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996, Preface, p. xi, xiii, 445,)

“Blessed Michael Rua, who knew Don Bosco as few others did (Rua was the first successor of St. John Bosco as Rector Major – Superior General – of the Salesians, and one of his students) left us this brief but highly accurate profile of the saint:

He did not take a step, utter a word, or put his hand to any enterprise that was not aimed at the salvation of young people. He let others go about accumulating riches, seeking pleasures, and running after honors. Don Bosco’s heart was set on nothing but souls. In deed as well as in word, his motto truly was *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle* (*Give me souls, take away the rest*).

“To believe and to work for salvation” is all a human being can do, according to Don Bosco.

This zeal for souls can be seen in Don Bosco’s view of the priesthood, “He who embraces the clerical state sells himself to the Lord, and must henceforth set his heart on nothing in the world except what can redound to the greater glory of God and the advantage of souls.”

Prayer: The Glory Be

St. John Bosco, pray for us.